

Edward Pearce House
2 Benevolent Street
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HABS No. RI-201

HABS
RI,
4-PROV,
101-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. RI-201

EDWARD PEARCE HOUSE

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Address: 2 Benevolent Street, Providence, Providence
County, Rhode Island

Plat 12, Lot 330

Present Use: Demolished 1960 by the Hope Club which is lo-
cated on the adjoining property on Benevolent
Street, and uses this lot for parking now.

Brief Statement
of Significance: This house, built in 1853, was an example of
the work of the Providence architect, Thomas
Tefft. It was a large, simple, compact, three-
story, brick building with brownstone trim,
typical of Tefft's work.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physieal History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The house was originally
owned by and built for Edward Pearce (A. Glass, Early. . .
pp. 50-51) who had lived at this address since 1832
(Providence Directory). It remained in the Pearce
family until 1901.

1901 William B Pearce (unmarried) sells to Arthur H
Watson that lot of land with all buildings and
improvements bounded: W by Benefit Street
89.92 N by Henry Hidden and Elizabeth Dunnell
136.13'; E by Hope Club 80.76'; S by Benevolent
Street 93.25' being lot #10 set off to grantor
by equity. . . Plat Book #24, page 5, in Providence
City Hall.

The property was taxed to the following persons in
the year designated:

1914 Harriet S W Lewis wf John B
1932 Harriet S W Lewis wid John B
1959 Hope Club

2. Date of erection: 1853 (A. Glass, . . .)
3. Architect: Thomas A. Tefft
4. Original plans: Tefft's original drawings for this
and other buildings are in the John Hay Library,
Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island.

5. Sources of information:

Anita F. Glass, Early Victorian Domestic Architecture on College Hill (unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Art, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 1960), pp. 50-51.

Barbara Wriston, "The Architecture of Thomas Tefft," Bulletin of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, vol. XXVIII, no. 2 (1940), pp. 37-45 and "Thomas Tefft, Progressive Rhode Islander," Collections of the Rhode Island Historical Society Vol. XXXIV (April 1941), pp. 60-61.

- B. Supplemental Material: The following is transcribed from Anita Glass, Early Victorian Domestic Architecture on College Hill (unpublished Master's Thesis, Department of Art, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 1960), pp. 50-51:

"...Tefft's sketch and the completed structure are identical in design. The Pearce mansion is a simple, compact box-like shape similar to the Tully Bowen house, but much less pure in its classic simplicity. Its basic shape is complicated by projections, such as the side bays and the broken line of the roof. Tefft's desire to give importance to the entrance by projecting the central section of the facade under a pointed gable is clumsy. In the Tully Bowen house this was accomplished by the simple stately design of the doorway and emphasized by the pediment on the window above it. The interest in texture which Tefft expressed with such vigor of imagination and delicacy in the Union Depot is not so successful here. The hard surface and narrow joints give a flat feeling to the brick wall. It is true that the brownstone trim casts bold shadows over the flat surface and gives it interest, but there is a crudity and coarseness in the quoins and brackets. The doorway with all its surrounding elements is especially disturbing. Its basic design derives from Batty Langley's eighteenth century English pattern books, but the fussy classical motifs on the brackets are not part of the integrated whole and seem an afterthought. The importance of the entrance is minimized by the brownstone quoins which confuse the effect. On the other hand, the windows seem to give stability to the front. Symmetrically placed and simply articulated, they clarify the basic shape. The house sits well against its site, its aristocratic position enhanced by the low brownstone wall and iron fence of geometrical design. The posts at the gate are similar to many of Tefft's tombstone sketches.

"The interior of the house is based on the academic plan of the eighteenth century. Tefft had definite ideas on interior layout and, in a lecture given in Providence in 1852, laid down a few rules for architects: 'In the arrangement of a plan, the living room should command the approach to the house, the morning or afternoon sunlight and the principal view and by no means should the parlor in the room least used occupy the pleasantest portion of the house; that is a common error and should be avoided. - - - Plenty of light is another essential feature of comfort, but it is an absurdity to build so many windows in a house that a portion of them are to be forever kept shut, thus increasing expense in a building and coldness in winter.' Tefft follows these rules in the interior of 2 Benevolent Street. The square rooms are regularly disposed off the center hall, the living rooms are sunny and inviting and the few large windows, symmetrically placed, let in plenty of air and sunshine. Spacious and comfortable it may be, but it is not very interesting. There is a monotony in the size and proportions of the rooms. The moldings and interior details are unimaginative and the fireplaces, all by Tefft, though in simple classic good taste, are dull. We must remember, however, that Tefft was only in his late twenties when he designed this house and his experience with interior detail was limited."

Prepared by Antoinette F. Downing and
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Society
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AND

Osmund R. Overby, Architect
National Park Service
February 1962